




Jordan Farms

*An Epic in
Homespun*



F. E. Pierce





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JORDAN FARMS
AN EPIC IN HOMESPUN



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JORDAN FARMS

AN EPIC IN HOMESPUN

By

FREDERICK E. PIERCE

*Author of "The World That God Destroyed,
and Other Poems"*



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7.4.22.

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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First published, October, 1916

TO THE UNKNOWN RELATIVES OF
NEW ENGLAND'S GREAT MEN

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JORDAN FARMS
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PRELUDE

THE VILLAGE CEMETERY

Let him who loves a stern and rural tale,
Told simply of stern, simple lives, give ear,
Crouched on the grass of this old burial-ground,
Where many an hour the butterflies and I
Watched day unheeded glide to evening. Here
Meet past and present; each memorial stone
Links dead and living, makes us heirs of time's
Great human treasure trove. A voice around
Goes up as out of Dante's world of dead,
Old love and hate and noble deeds unknown.

In these two graves lie kinsmen, dust by dust.
One woman loved them both, one rood of ground
Shall hold their bones till time forget its count;
Yet Congo's heat and Greenland's frozen world
Were not more sundered than their lives and souls.
And I, who never saw them, hearing long
In sad rehearsal tales that haunt the tomb,
Mused near their graves in twilight's mellowing
beam,
Or drowsy noontide, till my thoughts communed
With them, or what they were. Then, curious
grown,

From all remaining records and the talk
Of aged folk I strove to build anew
The lives that were, the changing characters,
The men who walked these fields and now are not.

As erst in Endor, round the spell they rise
Of witch and Saul, of playmate, friend, and foe.
Dead feet are on the grass of other years;
Old deeds are done; old words from echo's tomb
Reverberate, hollow sounding, false or true,
Such dim half-truths as buried lives allow.
Even while I write my models melt and change;
The old New England like the gray Old Year
Dies on the stroke of twelve; and at the door
His red-cheeked opposite brings in the new.
And I, who saw the old days fading, tell
What future readers may but find in tombs.

Count not my story sad; for many a time
Are Hope's apostles they who walk in tears
Life's darkest nook to find joy even there.
I lead through night, but night with rising stars.

PART ONE

THE TRAIL OF THE WASTER

From the confessionals I hear arise
Rehearsals of forgotten tragedies.

Longfellow's Divina Commedia.

Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving.

Browning's One Word More.

A. WHAT I LEARNED FROM HENRY JORDAN'S NEIGHBORS

The hills roll down to plain, the plain to knolls,
The knolls in turn to pool and swampy swale,
White flash of fall, and homes far off and few.
There deep in green, so walled about with trees
It looks a sylvan temple miles away,
But near a farmhouse weathered, marred, and old,
Stands Jordan Farms. Around it drowse the fields
Where Henry Jordan played, and earlier yet
His uncle Wellman. Ancient ivies drape,
Unchanged, the room that saw the buried born.

I paused in entering. Lowing cattle came
Along the highway urged by shouting men,
Red Devon oxen, handsome, sleek, and strong,
Their wide horns flashing in the noon. Behind
Their owner rode, pink-cheeked and cheery-eyed,
Incarnate gale and sun; and seeing me
He leisurely halted in the wind and shade.

"A handsome place," he said, "but ruined now,
With mossy roofs and window-frames awry,
And tumbling walls and acres gone to waste,
Where fifty years ago no finer farm
Was found for miles, more rich and handsome too,

In Almon Jordan's time. But when he died
His young half-brother Wellman, whom his wife,
Some say, preferred in childhood, married her;
Then waste, decay, and ruin followed fast.

"And Henry, Almon's boy, had gifts of mind
That elsewhere might have shone; his baby head
His father blessed in dying, telling them all,
'Give him the chance I never had.' But here
His wild stepfather's waste and mother's folly
Chained him at work God never meant him for.
So year on year he drudged against the grain
With dead men's debts on land the dead ran down,
Among these lonely hills where no one comes;
Read books for hours to make his mind forget;
And piled up useless knowledge, and grew poor."

"Yes, yes," a passing neighbor echoed, sad
As earth's grim prose in fancy's emerald isle,
A village lawyer, bowed and white with years,
"Wellman was only a boy and praised by all,
Mother and ladies, college mates and friends,
More loved than loving, marrying lightly; and
grew—

No matter what, since he is dead, but darkened
By petty tyranny all his stepson's boyhood.

"One summer evening near The Farms I heard
A voice that mocked and domineered, and saw,

On drawing closer, Wellman's angry form,
Fading in night among the tamarack trees.
In glowing moonlight Henry passed, mere child,
Before that home the dead had built for him,
Trembling with powerlessness of wrath, and sob-
bing
Wild threats of what his manhood's years would
do.

"Some loved the orphan boy; he grew in time
Grave, reverent, fearing God and wronging none;
But fates were all against the man; his life,
However good, was one long failure, sir."

He shook his head; and over him a breeze
Woke a dry sob among the brooding boughs,
The drover echoing, "failure." I in doubt
Approached the dead man's hushed and empty
house.

Too old, too molded round dead lives it seemed
To make new lives a home; yet sunny in age,
And calm in green seclusion. Ruby-throats
Built in the doorway, hummed among the flowers.
The long grass drowsed with naught to do but
dream.

Like hospitable souls the apple-trees
Reached down their reddening meal; and lisping
leaves

Breathed table-talk of dead New England dames
Through endless afternoons. Embayed in green,
The porch, all verdure, seemed a twinkling pool,
With trumpet-flowers for mirrored moonlight; only
One spray above the door and entering guest
Hung arms of benison, floral bugles flaring,
Blowing dumb music out of no-man's land,
Or out of lands that hold the owner now.
His scythe hung rusting in the butternut.
His ox-yoke rotted by the cherry's root.
And saw and plane, the rust on tooth and edge,
Amid the shavings where he left them lay.

With borrowed key I softly tried the door,
That yielded groaning; and alone I stood
Where he so many a time had stood alone.
Ancestral faces from their frames looked down.
Old portraits lined the mantel-ledge, dark-stained,
Perhaps where rain from leaking roofs had run,
Or tears from welling hearts. A marker lay
Between his Bible's leaves at John Fourteen.
"Let not your heart be troubled," he had read;
"Ye trust in God, believe ye too in me";
"I will not leave you comfortless." Even so.
The Family Record, dim with time, was torn
Where Wellman's name should be; but right above
Some later hand had traced the name again.
That might mean much or nothing. All beside
Was eloquent of a good and tranquil past.

B. WHAT I LEARNED FROM MRS.
ORMOND (FORMERLY HESTER
DANE)

With rustic, old-time elegance, her room
Wherein I waited seemed an ancient isle
In seas of modern change, ancestral plate
On time-worn sideboard, chairs that Lafayette
Might bow above to grave colonial dames.
In front the windows viewed a yard with flowers.
Behind they framed a scene of harvest where
With cracking whips great nodding loads of hay
Creaked slowly up to broad and shadowy barns.
There moved the present flushed with heat and
hope.

My hostess entering led the past with her.

“Your thoughts would make the dead relive; for
me

Still Henry Jordan lived, so late he died.
How he and I grew friends at first remains
A small blue peak in memory's distant haze,
Too dim through years to trace the path we trod,
Though not too dim to know we once were there.
But I remember following far with him
The small brown brook among the alders winding,

To watch the darting trout, or sit for hours
On banks of fragrant mint, whose woven leaves
We sailed in garlands down the dimpling stream.
Through dark ravines where rills ran strangely red
From moldering sandstone walls, and hemlocks
hung

Like night at noon, in timorous joy we stole;
Or carved our names' initials interlaced
On some broad beech's smooth and silvery rind.
And head by head above the books we loved,
The queer old books enchanting children then,
When all were rare, and welcome being rare,
We roamed with elves and talking birds, or cried
At woes of many a heroine, robbed and wronged.
Quaint Bible tales and history's lives we learned;
And where the words were blind read meanings in,
Such as make authors gasp and children glad.

"Much too we played together. Deep in wood
There grew a tree whose trunk, too early bent,
Rose not in air but crept along the ground,
All save the branching top that skyward spread.
Here hour by hour where no intruder came
In play we voyaged a fancied deep, our hull
The trunk with upright boughs for mast; our sails
The leaves that shook in wind forever cool.
All tales and pictures out of foreign lands
We gathered there, and studying them for chart
Sailed where we would. Along the mottled trunk

The weeds and grasses, ruffled by the breeze,
Waved up and down like billows as we steered.
Only at times of one we spoke, whose oars
In that dark wood we feared or feigned to fear,
A pirate Wellman, who must never know
Our ship or where it sailed. He never knew.

“To that child’s tryst one morning Henry came
With cheerful face that laughed among the leaves.
‘Wellman is gone,’ he cried, ‘Wellman is gone,
Far, far out west to Californian mines,
With half a world between us. Mother cried,
Because he goes and quarreling made him go;
But I—I’m glad!’ That was a happy day.
Through oak and tulip-tree the sunbeam slid;
Deep in the woodland sang a hermit thrush;
And on our sylvan galley, hour by hour,
Through haunted seas we old shall sail no more
We floated forth together. Many a year
On deeps where dipped no pirate Wellman’s prow
Our lives went gliding happily after that.
He had no sister, brother none had I;
Sister and brother in our souls we grew,
Too close to be most close—or soon forget.

“There came a time when one most dear to me
Grew dear to him in ways I never dreamed.
This ambrotype, faded as memories fade,
Was hers her bridal day—the face he chose—

With glad yet haunted eyes, as if she knew
That love was near and death not far away
That fateful hour. She died so long ago
The mere recalling tells me I am old.
Sweet, gentle face; men like a clinging vine,
And love its memory past all living love
When death undoes its beauty. Peace to the dead!

“She was my little sister, sir; and I,
Who half had mothered, could not hate her now
For stealing him, whose grave and careworn face—
When he was man and she was only a child—
Would meet her laugh with slowly kindling smile.
So child grew woman, playmate grew beloved,
Before we knew, but yet no pledge was theirs.

“For Henry dared not marry, not with her,
That fragile child, unfit for want’s hard road,
The bitter, only road that Wellman’s life—
Thoughtless and free, flinging the golden shower—
Left that impoverished home. And duty stilled
Each bridal thought before a mother’s need.
For wild, fast men, her husband’s western mates,
Had trained in vices never known till then
That pleasure-loving heart. Those golden dreams,
Returning others robbed of health and home,
To Wellman’s friends gave back a ruined soul,
Incurable. For old days women still,
Though men condemn, recall him tenderly;

Great nature's work of mingled grace and guile,
With charm so sweet his victim, knowing all,
Forgave,—so once to women Wellman seemed.
And this his angel yet may plead above:
Each darkest deed, all malice, all things more
Than wayward flights of many a petted son,
Were never seen before those western years
With wild adventurers, ruiners of their friends.

“Now first across my sister's humble days
Flashed fortune's changing gleam. A gray great-
uncle,
Whose daughter's name she bore, whose dim old
eyes
Beheld in her his own dead Ellen's youth,
Moved by sad memories willed her all he owned,
Green miles of meadow, golden wands to wave
And make hope's visions true, the long deferred.

“This Wellman learned when sin's requiting
hour—
That troubled conscience, yet with driving fear
Made dumb its warning—placed him, home and
name,
And loved one's peace if yet he loved, in power
Of one who wooed our little heiress. Then—
We guess what terms they made, what bland
excuse.
'No harm,' their evil angel whispered, 'nay,

True kindness rather, guiding one so young
To her own good, uniting wealth to wealth.
So, plotting well, between the loving pair
They thrust an evil shadow, lengthening still;
Till all one night, while Henry talked with us,
Burst out like lightning. Clearly yet I see
The nephew-stepson's angry face, the lips
Lashing the liar, and eyes like probing fire,
A lifetime's injuries finding voice at last.
Even I who knew him stared; and Ellen heard
White as the lily bells her bosom heaved.
Just once I thought, 'She might not choose him
now';

Till Wellman, cowering but defiant, sneered,
'Brave frightener of girls!' and Henry turning
Stopped short before her glance. In that long
pause

Between our blinds through open windows blew
The dewy blossom's odor. Hushed and mild
The rippling river talked with tranquil night.
Then something touched me, now remembering first
His lack of sisters, *all* she meant to me.
I stole away, and past my window heard
A wild, dark figure muttering curses go.

"Late, late that evening after Wellman left
They sat beneath the maple, through whose leaves
The moon looked in, retired, and looked again.
Some barrier broke that hour, beyond recall

Uniting two who might have chosen others;
But all is past, and none can change it now.

“Yet fatal work began that moonlit night
From Wellman foiled, whose bright, unbalanced
mind

Too much our uncle's feeble age admired.
And now beside his deathbed Wellman urged
Art, charm, and flattery, too, in anger's cause.
Our uncle died. His first will, seven years made,
Gave Ellen all; the last, a fortnight old,
Gave part to Wellman, most to charity.

“But nothing of that one week before we knew,
My sister's bridal night, when late in June
Before this very alcove where to-day
I sit so old and lonely, stood the bride;
And friends who made life sweet for her and me
In voices now unheard breathed hope and love
Round sunset-kindled windows. Red and white,
Lining the wall from gate to doorway, bloomed
My great-grandmother's roses. Dewy winds
With breath of honeysuckle filled the air;
And all seemed happy. First to greet the bride
Was Wellman, bowing like some old grandee.
He may have smiled at what he learned that day,
And all know now, his triumph and his shame.
He kissed the bride his bygone joys made poor,
And mocking wished her joy, and went his way.

“And so my sister came to Jordan Farms.
With sunny head, like morning light she flitted
By smoky wainscot, huge, colonial crane,
And long, dark cellars piled with cask and bin,
Or fed the flushed and hurrying harvest hands
When sheaves were heaped and rumbling thunder-
heads heaving.

And she was glad; but round the place there clung
Black nearing clouds that kindness hid from her.
Often at night, he told me, half awake
The new-made husband saw through darkened
panes

The peering boughs of elm and tamarack grow
Dim wolves of want that rose and fell on wind
Against the barrier soon to give them way;
And groaned and said: ‘He might have kept his
wealth,

But told in time that we could wait and plan.’
With bitterer tears dead love and late remorse
Wet the frayed pillow where his mother dreamed,
Or showed the gray grandmother’s grief, who lay
Mourning, she moaned, beside her open grave.
Her Wellman, youngest born, bright, handsome,
learned,—

Child of the gay young wooer whom in youth
She chose, misjudged, refused; and married late,—
Who drank up knowledge at a glance, and flashed
And scintillated while the rest were dumb,
Indulged and flattered through the years to be

The family plunderer and the family shame;
And ever in her eyes the dumb reproach
Of him who stayed, her younger Esau, robbed
Of wealth, career, and boyhood's happy hours.

"A year went by. A child was born, but died
At four days old, the prettiest little thing,
The only grandchild mother's house had known.
Within the chapel Henry sat by me—
For grief that moment drew our minds together—
Sole, lonely mourners. Till the sexton came
Against his heart the little coffin lay.
That was the only time in all his life
Those hands held son of his; and he, I know,
Thought much of children. Winter came again;
And darker yet the shade of death returned
For my doomed sister, yet, disguised, it long
Left hope alive; and bitterly Henry thought
How wasted wealth that either might have owned,
When life hung wavering in the doubtful scale
Perhaps had saved her; but I think not so
Nor lay her death on Wellman's burdened soul.
Her heart was brave, and like a saint she died.

"Three hours past midnight from the door I
stepped;
'Twas bitter cold, keen stars and twinkling frost.
All life seemed exiled from the frozen fields.
A something dead, a living force of death,

Gripped face and bosom. Hollow underfoot
Like ancient coffins crunched the crusted snow;
And sidelong through a distant window glowed
The dreary lamp that watched a passing soul.
Then some one came and whispered, 'All is over';
And in I went, and found my sister's hand
Clasped in her husband's, but between the two
The Mystery old as Eve. Above her closed
The grave, and from her burial we returned
To that still house and evening's silent meal.

"Two hollow, aching hearts where each might
fill

The other's void, and bound with common grief,
We parted late that night. The silvering moon
Made rugged cliffs loom bland and beautiful.
So grief that hour transformed and mellowed him.
He pressed my hand and whispered, 'Come again,
Come often now. Hester, good-night, good-night.'
Often I came; and often near my door
He filled her chair among the lily leaves
At first. Then sorrow waned and life renewed,
Life with one task for him and one for me.
Young grasses peeped on Ellen's grave; and over
Dead grief and hope grew cares of everyday.

"I laid my flowers to-day on Ellen's mound,
And half on his, sighing in that still plot
Of ancient memories, over withered dreams

Of girlhood's glad, undisillusioned dawn;
The poor, forgotten farmer's wife, the low,
Unheeded grave of him who all those years
Had looked on life with brave, clear, open eyes,
To find its hidden wealth and share with me.
But God knows worth, however men forget."

C. WHAT I LEARNED FROM JUDGE WEYBURNE

Lonely but lovely, ridged and rent by streams,
'Mid shoaling verdure, ever changing bloom,
And gemmed with lakes, that little town unrolls
Whereof I tell. With nature's hush enamoured,
Retired from courts, Judge Weyburne here grows
old

Among the scenes from which his boyhood climbed.
And underneath his elms, or cool within
His deep verandah hung with rustling vines,
Through which I often thought a phantom past
Moved while he spoke, he told me all he knew
Of Jordan Farms. His voice was like the leaves
At times, a rustling sorrow for the dead.

"Last night so sweetly untranslatable
The brook flowed talking through the bygone
years,
It washed my thoughts by memories old and sad
In Wellman's life, that, wrecking hopes of friends,
Trode selfish joy's familiar, time-worn road
To fraud and public shame, till grief and care
His life had caused broke her who loved him down.
Long years of sickness fell on Jordan Farms.
Henry's last hope of college, friends, career,

Such feeble hope as Wellman's waste had left,
Died out in eyes that watched a mother's bed;
Died out in ears the doctor's warning filled:
'Her broken mind clings round her home of years;
If torn away her tottering reason goes';
And groaning out of life's great hope resigned,
The son on whom the load had fallen—stayed.

“Now when he weighed his future, prisoned
here,

A Tennyson's Ulysses, only bound
Forever on his little Ithaca,
Forever watching from his vine-clad porch
Man's far-off knowledge like a setting star,
Forever hearing in his ear the moan
Of western seas no bark of his might sail,—
Chained down for life at all he least could do,—
If then at midnight, tired and wronged, he heard
A late returning reveler drive below,
Unharness, fume, and reeling climb the stair,
I'll not condemn his wrath. But household grief
And alienated friends uniting, caused
That elder prodigal's willing exile soon,
His burden dropped for other lives to bear.

“Years Wellman roamed, as once in earlier days,
Far from New England; other friends he gained,
Flattered and fleeced and lost; and might be dead
For all that those he left behind him heard.

“Meanwhile his nephew’s married life, that pure,
Uplifting force, keen contrast with his own,
Was closed by death. But still the work went on
Begun by woman’s hand, though cold the hand.
His wedded days had opened wide for him
An unread volume, gently, gravely sweet,
In life’s long series. Still with tear-dimmed eyes
In silent hours of evening he could con
That revelation, though the gentle hand
That gave it first no more could turn the page.
Some months perhaps he gazed with breaking heart
On empty cloak or chair; but healing time
Poured balm on that, and round them wove a world
Of tender musings, holy memories.
Still from his album spoke her buried face.
Her thoughts moved still, awakening in his brain
From bygone words he now had time to weigh.
And so the years went by like drifting clouds.

“Then, old before her time, his mother died,
Leaving her little that remained to him.
And strangely soon her death drew Wellman home.
His vulture nostril sniffed the dead, and hoped
Some legacy. New friends had found him out,
And driven the hunted fox to seek his den.
Now, too, the only home his waste had left
Was that wild, wind-swept tract on Harmon hill
That years ago his wife had deeded him,
Not his to sell, but his for life to use.

There on his eyrie perched the bird of prey;
For folly and fate and wrong before his birth
Had made him that, a helpless, hungry thing,
To guard against through life, and pity dead.
That presence woke in Henry's days a mood
He hoped outgrown, bickering and sordid care,
The kind man's wrath at being roused to wrath,
Marring with rage calm hours of thought and love,
As bitter boyhood marred. He told me once
How first they met after those years between.

"It was an evening hour in harvest time.
And Henry down among the marshy swales
And bottomlands was mowing, tired with toil,
But calm at heart, at peace with God and man.
No sound was there but the soft swish his scythe
Made, shearing through the deep marsh grass, no
stir

But those same grasses, waving dreamily
In winds of coming night. Earth seemed as if
It had forgotten ages long ago
Man and the works of man. In such an hour
May souls win searoom to put forth and sail,
Free from the storms of passion, where no thoughts
Of other minds, like rocks protruding, threat
The fleet and fragile dream. On Henry stole,
As many a time before, the spell. Just then
A misty form by pool and alder-clump
More near and near approached. At first it seemed

A phantom stolen from his thoughts, or sent
From night's dim bound; but soon a face appeared,
Then mockery, and the earthling's evil mood;
And frowning front to front the kinsmen met.

“Quick challenge there and sneering, bold reply,
Touched rumored insult done the newly dead,
That now was owned as true. In western lands,
The hour death freed him, Wellman wooed and
won,

With lies that hid the truth from her, a wife
Too good for him to nurse and feed his age;
Child too of one whom Henry's father loved,
A cousin lost on western prairies, dead,
And long not heard from. ‘So your sweet, mild
blood,

In one your cousin though no blood of mine,
May soothe my evenings.’ Wellman sneered and
went,

Dwindling through haze; and seemed in Henry's
eye

A great brown spider crawling down its web
To a new fly, a victim near and dear,
Whom dead men's voices bade him watch and
guard.

“Good cause for fear was there. If ever wife
Through loving heart and undiscerning eye
By very virtues might make Wellman worse,

That wife ill fortune gave. But what she told,
And he denied not, of their life together
On Harmon hill, must damn him. Far from towns,
High up with howling winds in winter's teeth,
The only road that through ravine and wood
Sought out their home banked fathom deep with
snow,

No man nor woman in the house but them,
No neighbor but the stars and wailing night,
She lay there at his mercy, helpless heard
That sly, edged malice, armed with wit, or saw
The Circe cup poured out, the man turned brute,
The brute turned savage, and her home his den.

"On such a night, when every breath of air
Was barbed with cold and thick with whirling
snow,

One knocked on Henry's door. He opening saw
His uncle's wife, her little son on arm,
On those chill doorstones, wrapped in shawls that
gleamed

With tags of ice, like corpses both from cold.
She entered reeling, blown by entering wind,
Then faced her host. Snowflakes were in her hair,
And prayer and wrath and anguish in her eyes.

" 'I come to you,' she said, 'a friendless woman,
Find none save you who, kindred even in law,
Might hear my husband's deed this evening told,

And give me help.' Half fainting here she sank.
And Henry made the fire roar up the flue,
Gave her warm drinks and wraps, and played the
nurse,
With still, white lips and eyes that shone like
knives.

"Hours passed, and through the storm a man
rode down,
Mad with debauchery and the night's wild spell.
As midnight struck he knocked on Henry's door.
Then the pale wife between the drowsing fire
And drowsing women called to watch with her,
Started from slumber, heard against the pane
The beating of the spruce's wind-blown boughs
Like cold, insistent fingers gloved with snow,
And close without two voices, one that called
For entrance like the rapping twigs, and seemed
Like them inhuman cold, yet wildly whirled
In vortices of tempest; then the other
Made answer curt and stern as ringing iron.
The sterner voice prevailed; the other mixed
With howling gusts through distance, drowned in
rasp
Of closing doors and bolts that shot in place.
She drew the curtain. Through the grizzly whirl
Moved a gray form that seemed a moving drift
Out of the light, and out of her life forever.

“That other entering softly roused the fire,
Gently and gravely bade his guest good-night,
And late alone sat near the flames, that lit
A strangely tranquil face, in steely calm,
Calm as the sword that slays and quivers not;
Calm from the strong man’s joy in righteous
 wrath,
When mercy leagues with all it fought before.
In such a mood he summoned law to part
Whom man had joined and God had willed
 asunder,
Inexorable as fate, while safe through him
A pallid woman shunned the world and mourned.

“And Wellman’s wife divorced him, bringing
 home—
To childhood’s door, the door she left as bride—
A helpless child and broken heart to show
What marriage gave her. God, we say, knows
 best;
But I could weep for all the happy lives
That might have been had Wellman never lived,
And weep for him among his victims too.

“Within a month a poor, unlettered girl,
Who posed as wife and might or might not be,
Called from some past none knew of, shared his
 home,
And shared his night of life that darkened now.

For on that lonely hill with none but her,
Save some chance workman in the fields by day,
Depraved with drink and greed, by solitude
Walled off from friendship's humanizing sun,
What moods he sounded none shall ever know.

"Sometimes we saw him like his manhood's
ghost,
Pale, sunken cheek and gray, disheveled hair,
And cold blue eye with glint of opium dreams,
Glide still by former friends, or watch for hours,
With thoughts he never told, his boyhood's home.

"And once when sickness called, up Harmon
hill
With Hester Ormond, then a bride, I rode
Through landscape lovely as my words are sad.
Above the peaks of all the region round,
Wild, rocky crest and skyward heaving wood,
Cleared round the summit, like a dome it rolls,
With billowy pasture and smooth meadow, swept
By winds before unbroken many a mile.
Men say that from its top when air is clear
They see the distant Sound like shining haze
Past ridge on ridge of dim blue hills, that seem
To melt and mingle with the sea and sky.

"The house is low and small, in open sun
On east and south, with apple-trees behind;

But north a tall, dense hedge of hemlocks gives
A touch of wild and somber beauty, dark
As evil and mysterious as the dead.

“Here Wellman, wandering in delirium, lay.
And Hester watched that day, and I in turn
That night, a glorious night of harvest moon.
As midnight neared the pillowed face began,
In strange, coherent, lucid lunacy,
A story never meant for me. He told
How Henry slowly after Ellen’s death—
Slowly, her memory held him back for years—
Turned toward the sister, might have married her
In middle age and love’s mild afterglow.
Then friends departing called her far away;
And letters passed that fell in Wellman’s hand,
And went no further. Hurt and far from home,
She waited long, then married one most kind,
But not her choice, and wore her bridal veil
As mournful mark of love’s negation now,
Not love’s new dawn. I thought the speaker raved,
Till, pointing me with bony hand, he showed
The very drawer wherein the letters lay.
I found and brought them, proof of all he said,
Each old envelope like a coffin holding
Chill outer form where once a hope had lived.
What made him do it? Spite or jealousy;
Sheer will’s perversion wrought by dissolute years;
Or hope of aid from one who, kind to him,

Thus married wealth and so might help him more?
I asked him there; but through delirium's wall
No question pierced, no answer ever came,
Or ever will. In that bare, dismal room,
With lamp turned down, while on the roof above
Moved whispering boughs, and moonlight robed
the world,

'Twas eerie, half unearthly all alone
To hear him talk to none who heard him. Once
He rose among the bedclothes, crying at me,
'I fooled you, lovers!' and the aureoled heaven
Through broken pane and sagging casement lit
That wild, gaunt, mocking face. And then again
In changing mood he seemed to feel remorse,
Till all was lost in aimless babbling, talk
Of college days with wealthier mates than he,
Vain hopes, and money this one owed by rights,
And house and lands another robbed him of.
I once told Henry what that night revealed;
But Hester knows not yet, and hours next day
Watched there in pitying kindness, on her left
The old locked drawer with letters tragic now,
And on her right the man who marred her life.

"He drowned that winter, drowned before my
eyes.

With sad, foreboding heart in afternoon
I drove along the lake, whose frozen face
That hour was empty. I remember well

To my town eyes how desolate seemed the scene.
For thaws that followed storms made puddled ice
All pied with slush and snow, and draggled woods
On melting snowbanks dripped disconsolately.

“Then Henry came beyond a little cove
That laid between a treacherous frozen floor,
Feeding his cattle, and Wellman through the fields
Rounding the lake’s curved margin, joined him
there.

I reined my pony wondering what might be.
Across the pool the lonely landscape framed
A leering haystack, ugly, squat, and brown,
’Mid shaggy steers, and those two muffled forms
That filled the foreground seemed as bleak and
stern.

A long hill-meadow joined the land of both,
That Wellman claimed but Henry owned and
mowed

Always; it cost them bitter words before.
Brokenly and confusedly from far
I heard that mentioned. High their voices rose,
And each called back in parting sounds I lost.

“That angry hour made Wellman rash and blind.
With face turned backward, toward the sleigh he
came
Across the ice, that on a day like this

Was death's own trap,—and broke so near the
bank

He could not save himself though others might.
I saw and ran, slipped, fell, and rose and ran,
And knew it vain, but saw that fatal cry
Reached Henry's ear. One moment fixed he stood
In doubt or dying wrath, then down the shore,
Hurrying and white and risking life, he came.
The ice broke through with him, but 'twas in shoal,
He yet might save,—when some old, gnarlèd root
Deep under water caught his foot and held.
Wildly he wrestled with the claw that gripped,
But all in vain, and soon he knew it vain.
The water bubbled near, and that grim sky
Looked down unmoved, till on the bank we stood,
Where neighbors near us round a prostrate form
Talked in low tones, and one was answering,
'dead.'

I saw on Henry's face a mournful frown
Pass by and die away. With forehead bowed,
And frame that seemed to drop a lifelong load
In one great hour, he whispered as in prayer:
'I would have saved him, God, but better so;
Far better so for dead and living both.'
For years I heard that whisper, hear it now.

"That day, in doubt if Wellman's mate were
wife,
We asked his nephew, being next of kin,

'Where shall we bury him?' 'Anywhere,' he said;
'Close at my mother's feet, if so you will,
To ask her pardon; or far as strangers lie.
But bury him honorably, leaving room for me
By Ellen's mound.' Then some one said, 'Whom
life

Divided let the grave divide in death,'
And bade us dig beside that willow tree.
But while the sexton worked a cousin came;—
She died herself next year; she always held
That Wellman was a brand men failed to pluck
From burning at due time. 'I'll have no gulf
Divide my cousin from his family dust,'
She said; 'fill up that pit and dig again.
Eternity is long; in all that time
The man who here abased his life might lift it;
And these two streams that from one fountain ran
In the great sea of glass mingled with fire
Might flow together.' So we dug again,
In that still place where yesterday I stood;
Where age, deep reading hearts, and back of them
What made those hearts ere they could mold
themselves,
Finds many a fierce illusion melt away;
Where pitying lips that once condemned recant.
And there by wife and stepson Wellman lies,
According to old faith, which I believe,
Till the last trump shall summon. Ample time
Will they have there to grow more reconciled."

PART TWO

THE BUILDER BEHIND THE WASTER

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a God though in the germ.

Browning's Rabbi Ben Ezra.

The sulphurous rifts of passion and woe
Lie deep 'neath a silence pure and smooth,
Like burnt-out craters healed with snow.

Lowell's Vision of Sir Launfal.

D. WHAT I LEARNED FROM PROFESSOR MILNER

"Look there along my finger. Mile on mile
Through parted hills the curling river rolls.
The lovelier that they run not where they chose
But where they could, the giant spirals gleam,
Like some great poet's thought, that urging long,
And hearing far beyond the summoning sea,
Broke out a way through language. Ten miles
north,

With foot in stream and windy head, that height,
As I remember, looks down on Jordan Farms,
The quaint old homestead; lanes and weathered
walls,

And ancient well-sweep, and gnarled cherry-trees
That blossomed white in April. Henry dead—
His well and words beneath the cherry bough
Were welcome both. The past lived here in him.

"Thought, faith, and commerce found their
channel once
Through these hill towns, that life's withdrawing
flood
Leaves only stagnant pools. His type is fading,
Forever dwindling, drifting townward ever,
Where once 'twas common: self-taught rural sons

Of those grave, old-time farmer Puritans,
Who plowed and hewed and sharpened tools
beneath

The grand, grave shadow of the eternal world,
By swath and dairy weighed God's law and man's.

"Just one and twenty years it is to-night
Since first I trod this valley. Here I came
With gaunt old Veering, searching cliff and stream,
And shells and strata, where they dumbly told
Of rocks upheaved in some dim dawn of time.
And searching so we came by Jordan Farms.
Then Henry, glad to quaff a scholar's lore,
And roam the fields, for days was host and guide.
I see him yet against the morning sun
And dewy pastures, walking paths with me;
Now pointing where the far-off fissures ran
Of earthquakes ages old, and rivers wound;
Now urging us under a burning sun
To raid his orchard, saying pears were here,
And apples there, and cherry and plum beyond.
So Veering studied cliffs, and I our guide,
A soul like Adirondack mountains, worn
Through bygone storms in unremembered years;
High spires, where once the cloud for pennon flew,
Pared halfway down to plain, but massive still.

"One day far off on Harmon hill he mowed
When letters came; and lured by highland air,

Whose vagrant breezes down our valleys blew
Through wilted fields, I rode with them to him.
Topping a hill almost a mountain lay
That airy meadow, high and far from man
On the lone, houseless peak, where bush and twig
Shook evermore in wind. Below I viewed
Rough range, green valley, crinkling brook; and
gray

O'er field and spire a muttering storm drove on.
So dark it neared I sought the gaunt old barn,
Whose huge gray doors hung wide, and windy sill
Looked eagle-like for many a league below.
Just as I mused, 'So near the floors of God
Romance might walk with toil,' I heard behind
Gruff teamster's shout and snapping thong; and
then

Between the doors a yoke of oxen plunged,
With rocking horns, the piled-up hay behind
Reeling and yawing like a ship at sea.
Even as they came the storm above them broke,
Lashing the shingles loud as giant knouts,
And wrapping earth in scurrying veils of gray.
A voice I knew rose through the patter and whirl;
And in the door, hatless, with wind-blown hair,
Stood Henry Jordan, framed in crackling clouds.
Above the maple shook and thunder rang.
Behind in drowsy undertone we heard
The oxen munch the mows. The wild fresh air
Flowed by without, the clover scent within;

And loud o'erhead through beam and board resounded

The wind's huzza and drops in rhythmic dance.

"By lightning gleams he read his letters through.
And not more strangely moved have households heard

A broken clock none thought to hear again
Striking beneath a ghostly hand. In rain,
Scarce heeding where he drove, he rode away;
And half that night men heard him pace his room,
Talking at times to empty air, till pale,
With hollow, haunted eyes, he came at dawn.
'My uncle's one time wife has died,' he said,
'In poverty, friends dead and helpers gone.
The world's cold charity has lodged her son
In this rich orphanage that writes me now,
Demanding aid. I promise nothing yet,
But come with me and see the youngster's face.'

"All day we journeyed, first by woodland roads,
Where crowding bushes washed our brows with dew,

And then by train. Silent with hat drawn down
Sat Henry, hardly hearing words I said.
And billowy meadows and the echoing hills,
And rivers flashing sunlight, and the rest,
Fled by unseen. But when our journey closed
Beneath the great foundation's door, where wealth

From toil or sin of generations gone
Now housed the orphan poor, he suddenly paused,
Conning these words that lined the cornerstone:
FOR ORPHAN CHILDREN, BUILT BY AARON DANE.
'And think,' he said, 'his treasure might have built
Rich tombstones for the dead who need them not,
Need nothing now on earth from him or me.
What better use could I have found? Through me,
Not mine but held in trust for dead of mine,
Its later channel must have poured it here.
The deed was child of one who wronged me; yet—
God willed it good, it bears no taint of him.'
I saw no point in what he said; he seemed
Conversing rather with himself than me.

"But when his infant cousin crowned his knees
The man grew changed, tender yet warily fierce,
In wavering doubt, as one might think the Moor
Eyed Desdemona when he hoped her true.
Above those azure orbs he bent his own,
As if he waved a torch behind that door
Of thought's dim cave and asked who dwelt within.
Then close to either infant cheek he held
A childish portrait near the lad's in age;
I've seen one since; 'twas Wellman when at school.
Now on the painted boy, now on the living,
Now on that sweet young face where girlhood
seemed
With parted lips to wait life's blessing, gazed

The tense, dark eyes that seemed to strain and
burn.

Then up he rose and clasped the trembling lad.
'I think he is his mother's child,' he said,
'And therefore henceforth mine.' That very night
We took the boy with us and journeyed home.

"Through long, dull, drowsy hours the rushing
train

Piled mile on mile; and soon on Henry's breast
The weary boy had sobbed himself to sleep.
As sea-gulls nest beneath the sheltering ledge
Of ocean's cliff, the curly head lay safe
Under the gaunt, broad shoulder; and above
Two eyes looked down on him like ocean's deep,
Soft, fathomless, but revealing through their
gleam

Hints of old wrecks and woes the waves had hid.
Sometimes on craggy heights the moonbeams fell,
On shining lake and swiftly sliding tree.
Sometimes beside us like a phantom train
Our own reflection rolled. I winked and drowsed;
But still in waking saw the slumbering boy,
And those deep eyes that watched him as he slept.

"So God's good angel entered Henry's home
In likeness of a little child, and drove
The lingering shadow from his lonely days.

"For many a summer after that we met,
By woodland lane or meadow heaped with hay
In hours of toil. Or under arching elms
He leisurely conned some volume, his or mine,
And puffed from tranquil pipe the filmy wreaths
He watched in thinking, counting himself alone
With God and ancient solitude. But when
My step rang near him, down the book would fall
On turf or moss, and out his comment came,
Keen nature's challenge to my greater lore.
Then we below would argue, and above
The chattering squirrels argued, and the wind
Blew lazily through the leaves and waving grass.
Or where some highland river's curling sweep
Had mined the bones of ancient Indian braves,
He told the legends of his township, lives
Of early settlers, thrilling, often sad,
Of feathered chiefs whose moccasins had brushed
Through dew and blood there in old woodland
wars;
And weighed with me the rights and wrongs of
deeds
Awful to think of in that forest dusk.

"Warm friends were his; and one in widow's
veil,—
When Marshall, Wellman's child, neared man-
hood,—came
To make her birthplace home, near woodland mills

That, once her husband's, now were hers, and lay
In a small valley rumbling drowsily.

Dark groves of hemlock lined the long ravine,
Where often for beauty of the scene we drove,
And the unpausing wheels that hummed below
Waked thoughts of laborers lost in fairyland.
But angry millhands once in drunken mob
Endangering her and hers, we rode through night;
Came none too soon; and there my comrade spoke,
Revealing powers unguessed till then, and calmed
The angry crowd and sent them home in shame.
Relieved yet anxious, still we stayed on guard;
But not a whisper broke the calm. Below us
The long brown walls, like beings freed from fear,
Drowsed in the moonbeams, charmed by draping
 elms

And crooning water. Stars went wheeling down;
And heaven all night declared the glory of God.

“What thoughts were hers whose rest we
 guarded so,
We need not ask. But late the following day,
Coming on her and Henry all alone
In woodland paths of sun-illumined leaves,
I heard what I intended not, which you
Must tell to none till both are dead. Her voice,
Gentle and pleading, dwelt on Marshall's name:
'He longs for college where his future lies.
You cannot send him; I am rich; let me.'”

Then—her companion answering, this might be
As last resort, but never even from her
While hope was left in what himself could do;
And men might talk, and it were wrong to rob
The dead man's child of what he saved for her,
And so his friends might feel and blame the
mother—

She added, 'Once I might have had the power
To aid my friend's adopted son as mine,
Save for lost letters.' Then she murmured more,
That winds in foliage made inaudible.
The pair grew silent. Suddenly through the
gloom

Deep in the woodland sang a hermit thrush.
A pole and shawl as meant for mast and sail
Drooped limply still above the moldering trunk
Whereon they sat; and Henry's lips were saying:
'Old age may launch its boats; they never sail.
Too much for many a year have you and I
Been to each other ever to be less;
But frozen wax takes no new seal; we're old,
So old my Ellen's grave is sunken now.'
And she gazed long across the hills and said:
'Yes, old we are, cold wax formed long ago.'

"I turned to leave but broke a crackling bough.
They rose and called me, spoke of Marshall still.
Drawn on by that, I told what late I found
At Jordan Farms, and now had come to tell,—

A little mine, no fabled hoard, but such
As miser hills of lean New England yield,—
And led them where it lay beneath gray bluffs,
That, hard as penury, smiled in sunset then.

“That hour on Henry’s face there gleamed a
light,
As glowed the twilight down the reddening hill;
For there it was, beyond all question true,
His little treasure of the rocks, his own,
The magic key to open learning’s door,
And give his boy the chance himself had missed.
Thereafter often through the woods, alone
Or timed to tools of other men, I heard
His hammer tinkling in the dusky gorge.
Sometimes at night, for eager hearts work long,
It took an eerie sound, like blows of trolls;
And sociable and firm at noon it rang,
With joy of opening worlds for one beloved.
So Marshall learned what learning’s guardians
give,
Grew man and manly, nursed a leader’s heart,
We hope a leader’s gift. Meanwhile at home
The vein had ended, and the hammer ceased.
Sumacs and vines with their unsightly veil
Have draped the pit; but should I pass to-day
I should be haunted there by thoughts of him.
Weary but faithful many a time he came
With gray head bowed, and weakening in his age;

And resting oftener than in sturdier years,
Would talk with me, each seated on our stone.
'Of good and evil much we argued then,'
'Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,'
'And found no end, in wandering mazes lost';
Yet even as children roam a wondrous wood
Through paths to nowhere came back nobler men.
Some call him failure; some think otherwise."

E. WHAT I LEARNED FROM MARSHALL JORDAN

"As in a shadowy, preëxistent state,
A world of faded paintings, I remember
A city, clang of hoofs and roar of trains,
Gaunt, rumbling factories, and my mother's face,
With loving eyes and lips that never smiled.
And then no mother, strangers strangely kind,
Flowers on a coffin, and a great new home,
A man who frightened me with his piercing eyes,
Then grew most tender, and my journey here.

"Too young was I for grief or terror long.
Brought into country beauty fresh from town,
The great, wild playground of the clouds and stars
Above, my own wide playground at my feet,
As in a breath, while new waxed old, I grew
Child of my guardian and his fields. We slept
Together in the room he had as boy.

"Now seemed I fallen on enchanted lands.
In dim, unfleshly, spirit-haunted hours
Of growing light we saw through open windows
The giant maples wave their boughs, and heard
Their leaves like Memnon whispering through the
dawn.

Wondrous as elves, alive in open day,
Bright colored birds perched on the gleaming sill.
Nor lacked we phantoms true and terrible,
When, dread as Grendel, from the marshes round
Malaria-breathing fog in wind-blown forms
Stalked down the moonlit fields, and through the
window
Thrust in an evil head and clutching hand.
For hours behind my cousin or his men
I watched the ever sliding furrow fall
On bud and stubble, or through towering rye
His wheeling cradle sling the golden swath.

“Still memory when I ride a country road
Recalls his long forefinger pointing out
With what fantastic poise on writhing roots
That yellow birch seemed half to grow in air;
How yonder range through cloven walls revealed
Its far, blue kindred, or the northern shrike
Cut the loud wind, bloody and beautiful.
Like starfish floating in an emerald sea
The chestnut blossoms lit the depths of verdure;
A painted harlot through her leafy screen,
Beauty to gaze on and disease to touch,
The poison sumac peered. Our thoughts beheld
Mosaic mountains from the face of God
Bear down stone tables thunder-scarred with laws;
Or cataracts like a gray historian's beard
Half muffling voices out of time's abysm.

My guardian's treasured volumes hours I read
In green enclosures, where the birds alone
Kept twittering comment, and unswaddled thoughts
Roamed books like orchards, plucking where I
would.

And still at every pause the mighty ghost
Of him who wrote with lifted finger showed
The stately landscape of our restful hills,
Woods on blue skylines, hemlock-bordered brooks,
Pink knolls in meadows where the red-top grew,
And oats half ripened turning silver gray,
Till letters glowed and words were wonderland.

"One day while yet nor boy nor man, I reined
A friend's blood stallion down the rim of streams
O'erflowed from April freshets, wildly running
In whirling loop or fierce and arrowy flume.
Dim landmarks loomed beneath their glassy veil,
Old stubble ridge and rut of wheel, and gleam
Of tender grass like emerald. Then I saw
A little maiden on a new-made isle,
Marooned beyond a footbridge washed away.
She called; wild arbutus was in her hair,
And prayer and hope and terror in her eyes.
Through waves in which the trampling stallion
seemed

An Aucassin's I brought her safe ashore.
Not wholly stranger was she; with my cousin

Schoolmate and playmate had her mother been,
And friend for many a year. The maid herself
Had been to me a face and name, no more.
But first her helpless, quick appeal for help,
And then the added dignity she donned
As recompense for dignity forgot,
So much of woman in a child so young,
Wrought on me now. I verily believe
That in that hour the tendrils of her life
Began to twine round mine, though far away
Loomed still the hour when either thought of that.
For long she seemed but as a pet to me,
Mere child when I was man. Yet even then
Would visioned faces, though they were not hers,
Take on her likeness; and through hours of night
The ever rushing brooks did musically
Repeat the name she bore, though not as hers,
But love's; while rosy gleams that haunted long
Untrodden realms of cloudland, earthward steal-
ing,
Grew part of everyday. So years went by;
And child grew woman, playmate grew beloved,
Before we knew; but yet no pledge was ours.
The daisy chased the violet from our path;
Grave asters chased the daisies; tingling frost
With icy pendants hung the glittering wood;
Yet we confessed not to our inmost hearts;
And four long college years rolled in between.

"And now my one-and-twentieth birthday's eve
Heard manhood's ocean break on childhood's shore,
Where the tall ships that leave the land behind
Through the dim distance, winged with mystery,
sail.

I locked my door, and in my room alone
Heard the sad drizzle drip from eave and elm,
And voices from the future, martial bugles,
And cries from half-forgotten years. The words
Of her who bore me seemed to load the wind;
Its damp, cool fingers brushed my hair like hers.

"My father's orphan son, denied alike
His care and right to love his memory,
Hence doubly fatherless, turned in thought to him.
All call me 'mother's child,' yet oftentimes
When sad old voices seemed to wail at night
From purgatorial peaks beyond the dawn,
I've thought a nobler self, that died in him,
Revived in me might heal his branded name.
But, hoping that, my only memory of him
Remains a nightmare. Both my homes he haunted,
A ghost none mentioned, none would seem to know.

"Then came a knock, a face, and whispered
voice,
That called me down to see within that bed
Where years ago my cousin's wife had lain,—
And where her gray-haired sister, called in need,

By Henry stood,—a dying woman lie.
My cousin found her, senseless, drenched, alone,
Beside the road, where, cold in mist and rain,
The wind for miles unbroken broke at last
Through shuddering birches high on Harmon hill.
She thought them strangers, knew her end was
near,

And poured from burdened heart a life of shame,
Yet piteous too; but as I crossed the sill,
A single word she uttered thrilled us all,—
My father's name, and how they once had parted,
And three years later through a city crowd
She heard him call her old true name, but found
A broken spirit moodily craving her;
And came with him to live on Harmon hill.

“All there was changed; he drank, but drank
alone.

Those laughing lips had little laughter now,
Brooding and fierce; but that she hardly mourned.
For none were left to love him then but her,
Or flatter him, who from his cradle up
Had fed on flattery; so he turned to her,
Her own at last unchallenged. Then with time
He grew more gentle, kind in little ways,
And brooded over bygone things, and said,
She must not judge one whom his parents cursed
Before his birth with wayward moods and will,

First cousins, marrying as her church forbade.
The very noon he drowned he kissed her brow;
And there that moment willed her all he owned
On this old yellowing leaf that twenty years
She'd worn and gazed at, signed his dying day.
No man before had given her in her life
A dollar, save to buy his own delight;
Here were gold keys to uninsulted days
From one whose passions death had stilled forever.
For that in sickness now she dragged her feet
To see the house where once they lived, she said.
All men were praising Henry, cursing him;
Soon the one voice that cursed him not would
 cease,
And tongues lay waste his undefended name
For years; but even in death she bade us tell
That one who knew him found his gentler side.

 "With that her message closed. Some random
 words
She added later, which we hardly heard,
Only I know the dead man's name was there.
With thoughts none dared to tell we watched by
 her
In turn, at midnight closed her lifeless eyes.

 "No sleep for me could follow that; and pale,
In pallid dawn, I stole by room and stair.
The household Bible, open wide, lay still

Where one had read who slept no more than I;
And on the Family Record, yet undried,
Where years ago his hand had torn it off,
And morning's beam, like God's own finger, now
Moved over it, as if in books above,
My father's name was written in again.

“Steps creaked on floors above; and, shunning
speech,
And haunted still by bat-winged thoughts of night,
I walked abroad to meet the healing day.
A tender halo, grief toned down by time,
All round my way, for whom a voice that night
Had blown its trumpet summoning up the dead,
Enringed the present where the past had been.
It haunted all: the fallen graveyard stone,
Whose weathered names were lost in trailing vines;
The long deserted home, whose hollow eyes
Gazed blank and windowless; cobwebbed beams
of barns;
And fences piled by buried fingers, brown
And lichened rails, frail as an old man's frame,
Their corners bound with knots of bitter-sweet,
Ivy and starry clematis, and brush
Like dense oblivion crowding on their age.
Man's inner essence clothed what man had made.
In these dead hearts that now no more could harm,
Misunderstand or threat or rival me,

I read our human mystery as no eye
Could see it through the passionate mist of life.

“But when the roads grew full of clattering
teams,
Through woodland walks I turned, where once I
played
With wild, strange mates among the talking
boughs.
Now deep and solemn morning whispered there.
The voice of centuries breathed through serrate
leaves
Of ancient oaks that garner truths of time.
The hemlock kings, whose dots of growing green
On darker foliage left from former years
Made royal ermine, deigned me audience high
Those airy hours of June; and tips of growth
Around them flaming crowned the dusky pine,
Youth’s Christmas torches bright on limbs of
green.

“I spied a figure soon that moved before,
Not seeing me, by knoll and dripping fall,
Till where a cataract plunged my guardian turned,
And meeting there we talked of random things.
At last he said: ‘To-day my office ends,
And what the old have known the young must
know.
Now read this letter, dim with all the years

Your mother's grave has greened, her last farewell.

It came the day before I found you first.'

In the dark, silent wood I kneeled and read.

THE LETTER

" 'Friend, I am dying. Let my letter sound
Like legends graved on ancient sepulchres,
Causing mild sadness but no violent grief
For those who grieve no more. You asked me
once

How one like me could choose the man I chose.
Would God some barrier then had risen between!
My mother died too soon for face or voice
To be recalled. From letters left by her
I learned my parentage, built wistful dreams
Round that far, unknown land where kindred
dwelt

Who knew not me, and where my parents grew.
Behold fate's irony. From that land came one
Not of our blood, but with a life inwoven
At every thread with lives akin to mine.
For that my heart leapt forth to him; and he,
Who felt his power but knew not that which
gave it,

Played on my moods, and watched his time, and
won.

He wed my savings; I a woman's dream.

" 'The rest you know, and knowing, think of me,
That she who once was but your uncle's wife,
May be your cousin now. O friend, if fate
Weigh not too heavy where it long has weighed,
Remember my poor boy, who, left unhelped,
May knock some wintry day at strangers' doors,
And at my grave, nor win response from either.'

"Tears blurred my mother's faded name; and
pale,
In that transfiguring hour that comes to all
By love and faith and courage kin to God,
However poor, my gray companion spoke.

" 'The years,' he said, 'this morning made you
man.
Your sun is up to-day, and mine is down;
And in my heart a warning cry, that soon
The boy I reared must fill my empty room.
My child, my blood, the voice is in your veins
That tells you more of me than tongue can tell.
I once had hopes and dreams that fire you now.
They came to nothing; yet for them I vowed
To clear your life of bars that ruined mine.

My task is done, and I at Heaven's throne
Without a blush may meet your mother's eye.
God bless your manhood all the years to come.
If ever on trails of thought you seem to find
The burnt-out fires of travelers gone before,
Remember me, the blood so near your own,
Not as men viewed, but as I strove to be.'

"Each rustic trace and mark of blighted growth
Fell from him now; I saw him, what he was,
A soul unbroken 'mid its ruined plans,
A baffled longing out of ending age
Forever looking westward unfulfilled,
The selfsame longing bold with youth in me.
A sunbeam wrapped his face in glory, eyes
Mild as a spaniel's, though the eagle's beak
Soared high and bold between; that lofty brow,
Like mountain domes that linger long in light
Of hopes that shine not on the glens below.
And all that centuries back my sires and his
Had hoped and willed in vain, welled up in me,
As earth's long caverned waters leap in sun.

"Hours glided there, and late we journeyed
home.

The sainted wood that day for halo wore
Reflected glamour from my burning mood.
A Titan's face the gray rock profile peered.
With roots like human limbs that yellow birch

Bestrode yon boulder like a dryad chained.
And wandering gleams of light for ushers led
With golden mace by aisle and anteroom
To grassy vistas fenced with towering trees.

“There fell on me a spell, an awe, a fear,
As of a God revealed. The grove ahead
Seemed grove no more, but some cathedral’s pile.
The small dark cedars that with cones of shade
Did dot the clearing were as monks to me,
In twos and groups assembling at the hour
Of prayer. And as we entered now the wood,
I thought to read on some huge boulder’s face,
As on a cornerstone, in mossy runes:
‘Built by the Eternal ere the birth of time.’
Through distant chantries like retiring choirs
Trilled birds, or wakened echo’s antiphon.
A living gargoye, mischievous and quaint,
The squirrel peered from leaf and pillared tree;
And ruddy fungus through the gloom burned faint
As glimmering tapers round a shrine. And on,
Beyond the columns and the tracery,
A sheeted cataract fell, from which there came
In solemn truth a voice behind the veil.
That which methought it uttered was more true
Than truly uttered; but I heard it thus,
That forest Pythian: ‘Child, the faith is here,
More old than Rome’s, more pure than Luther’s.

Lo,
Earth's mighty manhood soaring up in song;
Not verse alone, but that for which all verse
Is but the sermon, prayer, or choral stave,
The creed itself, the mystery and the power,
Unfailing comfort, consolation deep,
The light, the hope, the God within the bread:
The God of growth, whose creed is endless change
Of every creed in light of what we learn,
Who willed not that a spiderweb of words
Should bind the Samson in our race, yet less
That his blind force should pull all temples down;
Whose written word is this vast universe,
From vellum scroll to earth's wide verdure, sea,
Star-nursing night, child's face, and prophet's
dream.

In name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Young, eager heart, ordained for aiding earth,
Into the creed that was, is, and shall be
Do I baptize thee MAN.' And on my brow
The drops were sprinkled from the bounding
foam.

I know not what my bowed companion heard;
But through the woodland hand in hand we went.

"New years came following fast, with duties
new,
And hopes that drew me like ascending flame

Through magic books and haunted hearts of men,
Till love at last, full rounding, claimed its own.
My little maid before I knew laid by
Youth's chrysalis and rose a woman soul,
Tender and womanly, hallowing life for me.
Then late in summer on an afternoon,
Beside a roguish, dimpling, laughing brook
I asked and won her pledge of wife. And there
In love's first hour of full, unfolding speech
We roamed together memory-haunted ways
Of earlier hours where once we walked alone;
Or through the unbounded future, broad and warm,
Beheld our home's bright window star the nights
To be. Then from a bough that earlier turned
Than all the rest we tore the reddening leaves,
And wound them gayly round each other's brows,
And laughed; but underneath the ripple ran
Our blending lives in full, harmonious flow.

"Too beautiful it was there soon to leave,
And long we stayed. Below us danced the brook
That laughed and twinkled when my grandsire
wooed;
And ever we heard the soft and dreamy wind
Through the wild grape-vine and the plummy corn
Bear scent of ripening ears and clusters, peace
As old as Eshcol and Saturnian fields.

The sun went down; the clouds on peak and range
Like vast, ethereal altars flamed to heaven;
And toward man's temple of primordial joy
Our hearts went up to love's Jerusalem.

“Beneath that star that poured its melting
mood

Through darkened mind and iron hearts of old,
I sought the one who mothering life so dear
Henceforth might mother me. I heard her step
With beating heart that wondered why it beat—
She long had known, she loved me as a son—
And faltering told her all, our promise made,
My poverty but will to work and rise,
The long years we must wait. ‘Why wait?’ she
said;

‘The old grow feeble though you, the young, are
strong;

And death might come to us before the joy
That hour would bring. Your wife has wealth for
both.

Why should I shame beneath my hoary hairs
To tell the truth in ears I trust? Young man,
I loved your cousin, all my days I did;
Yet loved my sister too, was proud to see
The man she chose through many a lonesome year
Revere her memory. So her gentle ghost
Walked evermore between my hopes and me.
And once, by memories thrilled, we spoke of this,

Frankly, as friends of many a year might speak;
But both, remembering that sweet, buried face,
Grew dumb, and never mentioned love again.
We could not marry; now our children can.
We, gray-haired ghosts of long forgotten youth,
Might at your bridal feel our lives fulfilled.
Work hard, and play the man; but, sir, be sure
False pride ill suits true love, and marry now.'

"So that same autumn heard our wedding bells,
That echoed through the ancient hills, as if
Old loves awakening welcomed in the new.
Through crowds our parents came to wish us joy.
Her lips were smiling; tears were in her eyes.
But he, who saw my bride beneath her veil
So like the aunt he wedded long ago,
Blest us with trembling voice. 'Who knows,' he
said,
'How long the blessings God allows may last?
Turn not your back on love while love is here.'
In sun and music and a world of flowers
We parted. 'But we soon return,' my bride
Whispered my cousin; 'you must share our home,
And be my father. Promise.' And he did.
Then out we drove. Beneath the maple tree,
Whose earliest loosened leaves, green, gold, and
red,
Fell floating round, he stood and waved farewell;

And cheerily through the autumn air his voice
Pursued us, 'Till we meet again, my children.'

"We left him glad, came back and found him
dead.

May men lament for me as I for him.
He made the most of what his fates had marred;
God grant I mar not what he made of me."

F. NUNC DIMITTIS—BEING WHAT I
FOUND AMONG HENRY JORDAN'S
PAPERS AND WHAT DREAMS
I DREAMED OVER THEM

This little volume, traced in woman's hand,
With faded ink and ancient watermark,
And withered roses laid between the leaves,
In Henry's desk I found at Jordan Farms,
Piled on with papers, creased and blurred and
frayed

From many a reading. Strange how it lay there,
And no one saw but me. It is the diary
Of Ellen Jordan, 'tis a woman's life.
You read it not, for holy ground is this.
But humbly here my spirit trod, and found
The noble dream replaced by noble truth;
The hope that died, the hope that lived and grew
Beyond all hope; misgivings worn away;
And faded violets of sweet bygone thought
Enfolded here, as pure a shrine to love
As famed Mahal's in India's mighty tomb.

Here Henry's comment lines the closing page,
Dated one evening in the month he died:
"Late must we learn to know the hearts we love;

To bridge the darkened gulf of sex and blood,
Across which lovers daily clasp their hands,
And kiss, and comprehend not. Know me now,
Pure bride, unveiled by time, more dear than she,
That sweet, veiled stranger whom I wooed 'as you.
Like night and day in twilight's golden fringe,
One hour of mutual thought our days allowed;
But many a sunny mood was blank to me,
And through my night shone stars you never saw.
Yet blest it was in that one twilight hour
To walk and understand—before you died.
We won much here, love; what we missed is
yonder.

We here saw darkly as through glass, but there
See face to face." So wrote he; now he sees.

Near this a letter from his cousin lay,
The bridegroom's happy message, and his bride's,
Read that same day. And down the margin ran
A note in Henry's hand: "Spent half the night
In praying God to bless their married life,
And thinking of my own." At Jordan Farms,
Alone at night before a crumbling fire,
I held these documents of the dead, and thought.

You may have seen in darkened windowpanes
A lamp's reflected flame, and back of that
Reflection on reflection, flame on flame
In fading file, that, each a neighbor's ghost,

Build stairs through Nightland. So did dream on
dream,
And visions viewed by one in vision seen,
Float up before me from the smoldering coals.
I sitting there saw Henry sitting there
Alone without me, gazing at the fire,
And through his eyes seemed viewing what he saw.

In far-off lands, by mountain-guarded lake,
Or castled river, or gray citadel,
Walked two young lovers. And the landscape
shrank

In flickering flames; but those two faces loomed
Fresh in the foreground with rejoicing eyes,
And seemed to wave their hands toward one
unseen.

Then these gave way to scenes more dim and old,
A time-worn farmhouse, trees, and clumps of
flowers

Our mothers loved, a form among the flowers,
With gentle mien and garb of other days.
The clock ticked loudly from the land of time,
Unheard, unheeded on that timeless shore.
Flames leapt and fell, and pictures went and came,
But through them all that same sweet bygone face.

Slowly around on hill and homestead fell
The vast, dead silence of a world asleep.
Loose clapboards rattled in the wind, and stars

From western trails looked in with dying beam.
On fading fire and fading memories
Night crept and slumber; and good angels watched
Above the sleeper, waiting for the dawn.

So ends the record that I wove with warp
Of fact and woof of fancy; yet I trust,
In closing here, that eyes look down well pleased
From Heaven's immeasurable realm of peace.
Last by God's Acre when the glorious west
Renewed our faith in good Saint John, I came.
Round Henry's headstone, bright with day's adieu,
Husband and wife, that happy family stood
Which, save for love and deeds of him below,
Had never been, heads bowed in grateful prayer.
And Wellman's grandchild, only ten months' old,
Was dropping wildflowers on the sunlit grave.

END

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Author **Pierce, Frederick Erastus**

Title **Jordan Farms.**

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